

**COMMENCEMENT ADDRESS
SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE, PLANNING & PRESERVATION
UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND**

Ellen Moyer, Mayor, City of Annapolis
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Good morning. Thank you Dean Garth Rockcastle for the opportunity to be here today.

Welcome students, parents and friends -- and greetings Professor Emeritus David Fogle and John Hill, Associate Deans, Program Directors and faculty.

Congratulations students on reaching this milestone in your career. I understand that I am the first elected Mayor to speak with a graduating class. You probably are wondering what a Mayor of a small town whose name is unfamiliar can offer you on this special day. That's okay, most people know little about the representative system we showcase to the world or how to access it. But some time in your career because of the zoning and protective powers vested in local government, you will deal with us elected types. For now I'd like to share your capital city, a National Historic Landmark, with you. Its history and struggles are the challenges you will face in your new career.

As you come into Annapolis you will enter the first Baroque town planned in America. Inspired by the vision of architect Christopher Wren to accentuate vista and connect important sites. Francis Nicholson implemented a town design of circles with radiating spokes off a wheel.

In the prosperous years before the Revolutionary War, Annapolis was the cultural center of the colonies. It was often described as the Athens of America. George Washington and other leaders attended dances, parties and theater productions and horse racing, the sport of kings, was inaugurated in the city launching the most popular social event, Race Week, in Annapolis.

American democracy was born here and so was religious liberty. The Carroll family moved here

destitute in the 1600's to become the wealthiest Catholics in America. In 1708 Queen Anne established the municipality of Annapolis, the only royal chartered city in the colonies and the first municipality in Maryland. Three Hundred years later in 2008 we will celebrate Annapolis, A Leader of Liberty, Charter 300, the history, the struggles, conflicts and cultures that make us what we are today . Homes of the four signers of the Declaration of Independence are still among the cities many landmarks from the golden age. Annapolis boasts the largest collection of 18th century architecture in America. Saving them has not always been easy.

City landmarks threatened with demolition in the 1900's bonded citizens together. Led by the efforts of staff of St. Johns College the Hammond-Hanwood House, proposed to be moved to a Ford museum in Detroit, and Reynolds Tavern, to be demolished for an Exxon gas station, were saved. This action set in motion the voice of the people who voted in 1969 in overwhelming numbers(to the surprise of Realtors and business leaders) to establish a historic district commission . Annapolis has the only historic district in the country established by public referendum. Today, in the Capital City, the history of the past constantly surrounds us. A strong heritage foundation, active citizen participation, effective partnerships and protective laws have helped us succeed as an historic preservation model.

Preservation has served us well. In 2002 Barons News identified Annapolis as one of the top twenty places in the world to live. Four million people visit annually contributing to economic stability and an AA+ bond rating.

But today the city is suffering its own pangs of growth as vacated land with abandoned buildings outside the historic district, recommended by citizens, and zoned for development in a comprehensive planning process 10 years ago, is built to urban standards. Today some say that the new growth is destroying this special place.

If you were in town on May 4th through the 7th when the tall ships of the Pride and the Virginia and the Sultana anchored with the most modern around-the-world-race sailing vessels anchored with classic ships as the presidential yacht, the Sequoia, in the company of Skipjacks and Trumpys and Chris Crafts on a harbor where the splinters and the ghost of the great ship America of America cup fame is buried, you know that your state capital is one WOW of a town. Annapolis is, after all, America's Sailing Capital. Recognized internationally, we also partner with 13 sister cities, small maritime towns like us, in 13 different countries.

Still there are challenges to maintaining our diversity and human scale and WOW factor. Debate over growth dominated much of this year's State legislative session. Counties lobbied against annexation, a code word for growth. Towns and cities worked to kill this effort arguing that growth in populated centers was smart and environmentally sensitive and preferable to suburban sprawl chocking off green space. In the end Maryland's General Assembly passed legislation requiring cities to analyze water and sewer capacity and develop ordinances on adequate public facilities. Recent research indicates that sprawl is the unintended consequence of APO's.

The debate on growth did not escape Annapolis. Despite smart growth arguments and a city record for open space and diminished density, scores of citizens, mainly County residents in suburban neighborhoods, storm every annexation hearing in Annapolis violently declaring war on the planning commission. The battle cry is "not one more car." In your new careers you will be in the middle of this maelstrom faced with the challenge of maintaining successful cities and neighborhoods.

In your careers as architects and planners and preservationists, your jobs will require you to meet with elected leaders, representatives of a very diverse population. Despite the popularity

of attacking the credibility of those we elect, most of us try to make decisions consistent with the law and relative to the public good. Sometimes those decisions will conflict with your developer clients who the public also perceive as insensitive and greedy.

As elected people we listen to the pulse of public opinion. Perhaps we fail in our leadership role, concentrating too much on perceived public opinion. In the age of rapid communication, rapid pace and instant sound bites, citizens as a whole seem to be losing the art of dialogue and critical thinking. We are on the verge of becoming our own new lost generation. There is much work to do to bring some sanity to this new age.

A recent headline in the Baltimore Sun read “Preserve Our Heritage in Fells Point.” St. Stanislaus church and the convents attached, covering a whole city block in the core of historic Fells Point, was slated for demolition to be replaced by condominiums and a parking lot. The Sun article went on to say, this “complex is an important part of one of Americas best preserved maritime communities and is treasured by the Polish community that enabled the close-knit neighborhood to survive and ultimately thrive”. St. Stanislaus is a root of history.

Fells Point itself was saved from demolition for a new highway that launched the political career of U.S. Senator Barbara Mikulski. It is a popular destination experiencing an economic upturn. People want to live here because the elements of space and human scale and history and “cheers” are much in evidence. It is this success according to Jane Jacobs in The Death and Life of Great American Cities that - could spell its doom. Diversity is the vitality of a city. Excess duplication of one thing - housing for the rich, housing for the poor, office upon office, restaurant upon restaurant - crowds out diversity. Vitality is lost: Monotony sets in. Dilapidation follows.

College Creek Terrace in Annapolis is an example of this truth. The first public housing project in the state was begun in 1937 in the Clay Street area, the hub of the African American community. The neighborhood boasted its own theater and shops and bars and was visited by famous black artists. But at the time it also had a strip of slum tenements.

The Federal Government wanted to replace it with more healthy and secure living. Annapolis architect Earls Harder was chosen to design the project following the restrictions set by the federal government for low rise buildings and severe cost restrictions. Influenced by the spatial concerns of Le Corbusier in The City of Tomorrow and aware of Annapolitans' concerns for compatibility with a rich vernacular styling spanning four centuries and a city plan influenced by Christopher Wren to accentuate vistas and connect important sites, Harder's design incorporated a central open space for children to play connected to the vision of watchful parents, eliminated cars and included colonial revival style elements on building facades.

A journalist at the time described the model low rent housing as homelike and appropriate to Annapolis with soft red brick and small paneled windows that follow the pattern of colonial architecture characteristic of Maryland's Capital City. Harder thus became the unofficial mediator between the housing complex and the design desires of the community initiated in the early 1700's. Whether he was influenced by the architect firm of Baldwin and Bennington who left their mark all over Maryland in public works projects, (our public works garage is so historically designated) the Maryland state house expansion and the B and O train stations is not known, but they too adhered to architectural principals showcased in the colonial city.

What followed in the Clay Street area was not the expected improvement in living conditions. Instead the building of housing for the poor became excessive. A parking garage

for county employees that removed a half-block of housing sealed the fate of the neighborhood. Hotels and shops disappeared. Diversity was lost. Vitality evaporated. The neighborhood failed. The community became tense and conflicted and dangerous.

Writing in When States Fail, Robert Rydberg defines communities that thrive and succeed as having open and participatory systems, high standards for education of the total population, respect and tolerance for differences and a sense of stability with a predictable rule of law. These principles can be applied to neighborhoods and cities as well. When the contract between elected leaders and the people is abridged and the delivery of political goods fail, infrastructure deteriorates and decline in quality of life increases rapidly. Today over a million dollars of public money has been invested in this neighborhood to restore vitality. We still have along way to go before achieving success.

In the City of Annapolis the County, State and Federal Government own much of the land over which city planners have little authority. When the State acted to relocate the second oldest public housing project, Bloomsbury Square, to make way for a new House of Delegates office building, a firm they commissioned designed aluminum sided apartments and forty foot roads with no storm water management. The new site was situated on state land on the banks of College Creek at the gateway to the State Office complex.

Despite the location in the Historic District, none of the required design elements were considered nor was any compatibility with the new building or its neighbor, St. Johns College, the 3rd oldest college in America, considered. Our Historic Preservation Commission had been briefed but issued no comments. None of the usual voices of the community associations were heard.

Fortunately Governor Glendening heard my concerns and agreed we could do better. City planners helped redesign the site to Historic District standards. The city retained twenty feet of open space along the creek, rain gardens were developed, streets were narrowed and soft red brick housing was located to provide walking and talking space. While no one complained about what could have been some complained about housing the poor on valuable waterfront property. The same voices were silent when new dorms rose at St. Johns College several hundred feet away.

Annapolis has zoned for diversity, important to the vitality of a city, with mixed use zoning. Innovative over-lay districts insure balance and harmony in residential neighborhoods. The City has controls against demolition and on renovation in the historic district. We have tree canopy protection legislation. With 39 percent cover, Annapolis is the urban model for the State. Annapolis has the nation's only public urban land trust. The trust has saved more than 200 acres of breathing space in parcels large and very small. We have an energy efficiency task force, green roofs, and an aggressive program for rain gardens and stormwater. On our street ends that go to the four creeks are small parks to sit in, read a heritage sign, or launch a small boat. The Mayor's book club is discussing Jane Jacobs' Death and Life of Great American Cities a chapter at a time. Community groups participate with developers and in a process of give and take help shape factors of density and design and open-space.

We think we are a model city. It is not enough. Failed communities still exist. New buildings too often overwhelm human sensibilities. The voices of those who resist any change are louder and louder. There is an unsettled and growing hostility around growth, conditions that foster reactionary politics. Few of us rise to the standards voiced in Rudyard Kipling's poem IF.

“If you can keep your head when all about you are losing theirs...” You will be faced with challenges that impact the vitality that neighborhoods and cities need to thrive.

Building on the cares that all of us share in common may be our salvation. So listening is a good thing. In Annapolis we have embarked on a new collaborative process with our citizens. *Let's Talk Annapolis* is a process for building a base for the next comprehensive plan, the vision for the next 10 years.

Two hundred and seventy-one community groups and others have been invited to engage in an extended discussion around 4 questions ... How do we protect and improve our quality of life? How do we build a unified community? What should your city become over the next 10 to 20 years? And what one action can we do to make a difference and how can we achieve it? We have asked citizens to join with friends in their neighborhood or church or special interest group. We have set aside time in coffee house and pubs and at city hall. We have volunteer facilitators to lead the conversations. *Let's Talk Annapolis* is the most participatory action ever undertaken in this state if not country to inform the comprehensive plan. .

What are our citizens saying about the quality of life, the things that make life special? They mourn lost landmarks, they plea for the feel of a small town where as the “Cheers” theme goes, everyone knows my name. They ask for feelings of ownership that builds the sense of community. They want to feel safe and respected. They want a civil society and they want quality in the education system that recognizes creativity and challenge for high standards. They want breathing space and vistas in the urban neighborhood. They want development of human scale where the great I am recognizes the specialness of people over bricks and mortar. They want a sense of place that is different than anyplace USA. They want to make a difference.

Listen to the conversations and you hear the yearning for the things that connect us and bring us together.

You are the creators and recorders of our social conscience. Buildings talk. The architects from the past have given us our collective memory of past social orders and culture. You will leave your mark on the future. Elected leaders in a representative government must also try to be guardians of the future. The two of us should be partners.

As you work with your clients ask “does what we are doing add diversity and therefore vitality to the community? If it doesn’t how can we achieve it? Does our design provide opportunities for human connection? Are the elements of a successful community recognized in what we do or will our design foster conflict and eventual deterioration?

Listen to the people and their yearning for buildings of human scale, and design that respect human needs for partnering with the environment of the past, present and future. Listen to the people and the yearnings for neighborhoods with vistas, breathing space and place to gather for conversation, the number one connector. Listen to the people and the yearnings for buildings and neighborhood that dance, that have vitality.

If you create the sense of place through which the spirit of community arises then you will leave a legacy of a social conscience and connections that will extend far into the future for the good things we call quality of life. You are the mediators between development and the design desires of the community. You are the creators and recorders of our social conscience and our memories. You can inspire and ensure that successful and thriving communities exist.

Go forth and do! Good luck!